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ABSTRACT

This document describes the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), its new mission and vision statements, and a recommended set of strategic action areas deemed essential to creating the future described in the mission and vision statements. The proposed AACC mission statement reads: "building a nation of learners by advancing America's community colleges." AACC core values, representing the set of beliefs upon which all its actions and policies are premised, include integrity, excellence, leadership, learning, diversity, commitment, and connectedness. AACC intends to act as a bold leader in creating a nation where all have access to the learning needed to participate productively in their communities and in the economy. AACC intends to be an agile, aggressive leader promoting better understanding of community colleges as essential resources for the nation's vitality. Proposed strategic action initiatives are concentrated in five areas: (1) national recognition and advocacy for community colleges; (2) economic and workforce development; (3) leadership development; (4) learning and accountability; and (5) connectedness across AACC membership. (PGS)

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The Mission Project: Building a Nation of Learners by Advancing America's Community Colleges

"In times of change, it is the learners who will inherit the earth, while the learned will find themselves beautifully equipped for a world that no longer exists." Eric Hoffer

Background

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is the primary advocacy organization for the nation's community colleges. The Association represents over 1,100 associate degree-granting institutions and some 10 million students. AACC has been a national voice for community colleges since its inception in 1920. Community colleges mark their 100th year of service to the nation in 2001, and AACC is leading the celebration of the colleges as they provide learning opportunities to their students, communities, and the nation.

In the midst of this Centennial Celebration, the Mission Project provides an opportunity for AACC to reflect on its past accomplishments, respond to changes that are reshaping the higher education landscape, and explore the optimal future for the Association and its members. As the AACC Board of Directors launched the Mission Project, its members agreed that they sought a world-class document that will advance the recognition of community colleges, energize the Association, engage its stakeholders, set priorities for action areas, and support the Association's commitment to improve continuously its service to member colleges and their students.

The amount of change experienced in higher education today is unprecedented. Community colleges are facing competition from an increasing number of education providers, including those on-line. The Association too is facing competition from a growing number of organizations providing services to community colleges. While student demands for e-services from registration to advising to learning continue to expand, member institutions also have increased expectations for on-line services from AACC. The blurring of boundaries between P-12, community colleges and baccalaureate colleges has introduced confusion about roles and responsibilities, and it also provides new opportunities for collaborative programming. Changing global and domestic demographics are placing increasing demands on how colleges provide services and, at the same time, create needs for up-to-date information on which to design those services. The world of the community colleges changes daily, promoting expectations for significant and rapid responses from their national Association.

In order to draw on the knowledge, perspectives, and insights from across AACC's membership, a group of Board members and staff, working as a project design team, developed a broadly participate process for the Mission Project. This process included eliciting reflections from Board members at their August retreat, inviting staff input during a half-day session in October, engaging member institutions via an on-line survey, and convening Commission members and Council Chairs at their fall

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meeting in Washington DC.

In early November, twenty AACC stakeholders including a number of past Board Chairs, current Board members, and staff were invited to gather as Vision Group to digest, review, and synthesize the input from all of the groups and to use this input to envision the optimal future for the Association.

While the title of this project has focused on the word "mission," a mission document must go beyond mission and express the interrelationships between mission, vision, values, and strategic action areas. The figure below illustrates this dynamic.

This document incorporates the results of the work of the Vision Group, including a proposed new **mission statement** to guide the Association into the future, a statement of **core values** to undergird its work in the future, a compelling **vision** of a future worth working toward, and a recommended set of **strategic action areas** deemed essential to creating that future.

This Mission Document will be shared in draft form with AACC stakeholders via the Web in order to invite their feedback. After appropriate revision, the final document will be submitted to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors at its February 2001 meeting.

AACC's Positive Core

Whenever an organization contemplates the potential for change due to shifting external factors, it is essential to identify what is most valuable about the organization as it has evolved through its history. An organization sustains itself and expands its capacity to contribute to society by ensuring that the core factors that contribute to its health and vitality are the basis for addressing changes and adaptations in its strategy and operations. During this project, Association stakeholders have been asked in meetings and through surveys to describe the factors they have experienced that give AACC health and vitality and serve as the Association's *positive core*. The critical core factors of AACC have been identified by these stakeholders as its ability to:

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- Provide a national voice and advocacy for the community college mission
- Serve as a national information resource
- Create opportunities for peer networking at all levels, professional initiatives, dialogue, connectedness, and community-building
- Facilitate collaboration and teamwork among staff and stakeholders
- Engender a shared commitment to the community college movement
- Offer leadership and career development opportunities

The Preamble of the AACC Constitution expresses its historic core commitment by stating its members' shared belief that learning is essential for realizing the fullest potential of each member of our society and that appropriate higher education should be available to all who can benefit from it. While AACC member institutions are diverse in purpose, in type, in control, in size, and in geographic location, members of the Association share a singleness of concern and dedication to this learning mission.

Equally important, Ernest Boyer articulated our shared commitment to community. In his book, *Building Communities*, he wrote: "We define the term 'community' not only as a region to be served, but also as a climate to be created." (p. 7, AACC, 1988). As we move into the world of new opportunities in cyber-space, individualized learning, and community renewal, his words continue to serve as a rallying point for the community college movement.

Proposed Mission Statement
A mission statement is a collective statement by an organization's internal stakeholders describing their highest sense of purpose in serving society's needs. It should state briefly and clearly the purpose of the organization and the reason the organization exists. In conjunction with a compelling vision for the future, the mission statement provides the context for defining operational and strategic work. After extended dialogue about the Association's current and future work and with thoughtful selection of language, the Vision Group crafted the following mission statement.

AACC Mission Statement

Building a nation of learners by advancing America's community colleges

This mission statement captures AACC's commitment to advance the recognition of the role of community colleges in serving society today. By providing advocacy, leadership and service for community colleges, the Association will play a key role in assisting the nation as it passes from the industrial era of the twentieth century to the new knowledge-based society of the twenty-first century.

Proposed Core Values Statement
Core values are an organization's essential and enduring tenets. They represent the set of beliefs on which an organization premises all its actions and policies. Whereas the mission states what an organization does and its reason for being, the core values define the vital tenets undergirding how the organization will operate both to accomplish its work and to achieve its vision. As members of the Vision Group reflected on their own experiences of AACC and reviewed input from other stakeholders, they considered what set of guiding principles were essential to creating AACC's future. They identified the following core values.

Core Values Statement

Integrity: AACC places fairness and honesty at the center of all of its policies and operations.

Excellence: AACC provides services and support of the highest quality to its member institutions.

Leadership: AACC supports the development of community college leaders at all levels and creates opportunities for leadership among its staff.

Learning: AACC functions as a learning organization, continuously adapting and improving its services for learning in the field and insuring that staff have the flexibility to meet a wide variety of member needs.

Diversity: AACC operates in an inclusive manner, respecting differences among institutions and individuals alike and providing equity through its policies, programs, and services.

Commitment: AACC supports the passion of Association leadership and staff in service to the community college mission as well as to the success of the students and communities that its member colleges serve.

Connectedness: AACC fosters a sense of community and responsiveness that supports the ability of its members to network, to learn from each other, and to leverage their resources for action.

These core values will provide the touchstones for important judgments and decisions to be made by AACC leadership and staff.

Proposed Vision for AACC's Future

A vision statement must clearly and concretely describe what an organization will look like in the future when it is operating at its best. Together with the mission and core values, the vision provides a compelling scenario of how the organization will evolve. The key ingredients in an individual's ability to participate productively in society and in the economy are learning and the capabilities one develops as a result of learning. The community colleges in serving 10 million students today and more in the future will play an increasingly essential role in providing access to learning in America. AACC will provide the preeminent leadership to support and advance community colleges in this mission.

Vision of AACC's Future

AACC will be a bold leader in creating a nation where all have access to the learning needed to participate productively in their communities and in the economy. Through its leadership, community colleges will be recognized as the threshold of the American dream -- the learning resource needed to sustain America's economic viability and productivity.

AACC will pursue this vision by:

- Expanding its role as the nation's primary voice for guaranteeing access to and accountability for higher learning
- Influencing federal policy decisions relevant to higher learning as

well as media coverage that promotes awareness and understanding of the critical factors of student success

- Promoting community colleges as the premier workforce development providers in America and influencing government and corporate funding policies to support the colleges in this key role
- Fostering partnerships with P-12 schools, baccalaureate institutions, minority-serving institutions, corporate learning centers, and businesses that will insure that all students have optimal learning opportunities to meet their goals efficiently and effectively
- Developing community college leaders at all levels who understand and share a deep commitment to the community college mission and core values
- Forging community development and renewal by working to ensure access to lifelong learning to benefit individuals, communities, and society in general
- Providing the best and most accessible information to the media, faculty, researchers, policymakers, and the public regarding the community college mission, student learning, trends shaping education, emerging jobs and exemplary programs
- Empowering community colleges to grow as a global force for learning by disseminating information and supporting partnerships between American community colleges
- Creating a deeper and broader sense of connectedness among community colleges through technology
- Promoting public recognition of the value of community colleges and the opportunities they provide

In a world where more and more critical decisions demand sound information, productive actions require the best resources, and mass communication demands articulate spokespersons, AACC will be an agile, aggressive leader promoting better understanding of community colleges as essential resources for the nation's vitality.

Pursuing this vision will require collaborations with other community stakeholders, with university-based community college programs, as well as with other educational associations. Specific initiatives will be based on identified need and the availability of resources. Given the sizeable turnover in community college leadership that is about to occur, potential initiatives include new opportunities for professional development in leadership for faculty and staff as well as the expansion of community college CEO development. With technology available that can provide for rapid sharing of information, the Association will pursue ways to accelerate access to resources on best practices in creating learning opportunities.

Given the transition from a jobs economy to one where knowledge and skill sets are the crucial determinants of career achievement, the Association

should explore potential partnerships for monitoring and distributing information about the impact of social, technological, and economic trends on college curricula.

Engaging with its member institutions in new ways to leverage new opportunities, AACC will deepen relations built on trust and confidence while also challenging community colleges to grow and develop even greater competence in areas such as learning accountability, diversity, and globalization.

Proposed Strategic Action Areas

An organization increases the likelihood of its successful adaptation to change by developing an initial set of critical priority actions it will undertake to create its future. Creating the optimal future for AACC will require setting priority on how resources – human, technological, and financial – will be allocated. The proposed strategic action areas build on the current work of the Association in each area and provide the paths by which the Association will link its mission and core values to realize the compelling vision for its future. Initiatives that pursue these strategic priorities will in turn foster the emergence of newer initiatives in the years ahead. The Vision Group proposes that with the adoption of its new mission statement, AACC should concentrate its action initiatives in the following five areas.

Strategic Action Areas

Strategic Action Area One: National recognition and advocacy for community colleges
Goal: Community colleges are viewed as premier institutions for student learning, providing educational programs, economic development initiatives, and community renewal programs.

Strategic Action Area Two: Economic and workforce development
Goal: Community colleges are recognized as the preeminent workforce development providers in America.

Strategic Action Area Three: Leadership development
Goal: Qualified leaders are available at all levels of our nation's community colleges. They understand the community college mission, values and vision, and have the ability to implement them.

Strategic Action Area Four: Learning and accountability
Goal: Community colleges are the higher education leaders in promoting and supporting student learning and evaluate their success based upon student learning outcomes.

Strategic Action Area Five: Connectedness across AACC membership
Goal: A sense of community exists across the nation's community colleges that recognizes and celebrates institutional differences while finding new ways for colleges, faculty, and staff to share best practices and new opportunities.

America's community colleges have a rich one hundred year history to draw on as they serve their many and diverse communities. As their students daily demonstrate, attending a community college is the way to advance their careers, expand their livelihoods, and deepen their civic and cultural competencies throughout their lives. The American Association of Community Colleges is motivated and committed to provide the leadership that will further support the colleges in expanding the health and vitality of America's communities by building a nation of learners.

Provide feedback on AACC's Mission

American Association of Community Colleges
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 410, Washington, DC 20036
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